

Lovecraft Studies 15



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Mythos Names and How to Say Them

by Robert M. Price



any entities and items of the Cthulhu Mythos are tagged with epithets like "not-to-be-named", "the unspeakable", "the unnamable", "unaussprechlichen", and many readers will agree that these adjectives are deserved in more ways than one: just try pronouncing some of the Mythos names! This article will try to help the tongue-tied Cthulhuvian acolyte better to speak the un-

speakable.

To begin with the name without which one cannot even discuss the Cthulhu Mythos, how does one pronounce "Cthulhu"? Lovecraft once playfully told correspondent Willis Conover, "About the pronunciation of the Outside word roughly given as *Cthulhu* in our alphabet—authorities seem to differ" (SL V.302). In fact, Lovecraft himself may not have used one pronunciation consistently. And no wonder: Lovecraft goes on to explain that "the word is supposed to represent a fumbling human attempt to catch the phonetics of an *absolutely non-human* word . . . The syllables were determined by a physiological equipment wholly unlike ours, *hence could never be uttered perfectly by human throats*" (SL V.10-11). Lovecraft's own letters give one attempted pronunciation. He wrote to Duane W. Rimel:

The actual sound—as nearly as human organs could imitate it or human letters record it—may be taken as something like *Khlu-hloo*, with the first syllable pronounced very gutturally and very thickly. The *u* is about like that in *full*; and the first syllable is not unlike *khul* in sound, since the *h* represents the guttural thickness. The second syllable is not very well rendered—the *l* being unrepresented. (SL V.11)

Two years later, Lovecraft recommended pretty much the same version to Willis Conover: "The best approximation one can make is to grunt, bark, or cough the imperfectly formed syllables *Cluh-Lhu* with the tip of the tongue firmly affixed to the roof of the mouth" (SL V.302). This way of saying it is reinforced in two of Lovecraft's revision tales, where the narrator, not otherwise versed in Cthulhuvian lore, must spell out the name as he has heard others say it. In "Medusa's Coil" an old African woman is heard to invoke "Cloodoo", while in "Winged Death" Africans are said to refer in whispers to "Clulu".

The matter might seem to be settled rather neatly, but for the fact that various memoirs written about Lovecraft after his death by people who knew him depict him pronouncing "Cthulhu" in a variety of ways. For example, Lovecraft's close friend and literary executor Robert Barlow recalled

that "Lovecraft pronounced Cthulhu as Koot-u-lew".¹ While even an eyewitness report must yield in authority to first-person sources like the letters just quoted, Barlow's recollection does receive support from Lovecraft's tale "The Mound", where the underground dwellers in K'n-yan worship the primeval octopus-headed god "Tulu". One wonders if this pronunciation of the name were not influenced by "Koot-humi", the name of the most important of the Tibetan "Masters" of the Theosophical cult, with which Lovecraft was somewhat familiar. (In fact, these Masters served as the prototype for the "undying leaders of the [Cthulhu] cult in the mountains of China" in "The Call of Cthulhu".²)

Another close friend of Lovecraft, W. Paul Cook, whose encouragement was instrumental in getting Lovecraft to start (and later to continue) his fiction writing, recalled that "Lovecraft denied any derivative or phonetic source or system for the combination of letters making up that word ['Cthulhu'] and others. The reader must pronounce to suit himself. In that especial case, however, he suggested 'Thulu,' both 'u's' long. Some of them are less easy."³

Yet another friend of Lovecraft, Donald Wandrei, shared his recollection of Lovecraft's pronunciation: "I referred to this story ['The Call of Cthulhu'] one day, pronouncing the strange word as though it were spelled K-Thool-Hoo. Lovecraft looked blank for an instant, then corrected me firmly, informing me that the word was pronounced, as nearly as I can put it down in print, K-Lütl-Lütl. I was surprised, and asked why he didn't spell it that way if such was the pronunciation. He replied in all seriousness that the word was originated by the denizens of the story and that he had only recorded their own way of spelling it."⁴ Whence all the unsuspected "t's" and "l's"? Recall that Lovecraft had written to Conover that one must keep the tip of one's tongue fixed to the roof of one's mouth while (as he told Rimel) enunciating the syllables gutturally. Keeping all this in mind, Wandrei's transcription matches pretty closely what we might expect Lovecraft's prescribed pronunciation to sound like.

Still another clue, possibly pointing in another direction, comes from Julius Schwartz, a one-time Lovecraft agent. Nelson Bridwell writes: "In the August 1947 *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* there is a one-page feature on Lovecraft which describes Cthulhu as 'a word which only he could properly whistle.' I once asked Julie Schwartz about this, and he confirmed having heard HPL do just that—and said my own whistling was quite close to his."⁵ Cf. Lovecraft's words to Rimel: "The kind of . . . noise made in this way is not really like speaking, but is more like the sound a man makes when he tries to imitate a steam-whistle" (SL V.11). Well, then, how to say "Cthulhu"? Perhaps here, too, "The reader must pronounce to suit himself."

1. "The Barlow Journal" in August Derleth, *Some Notes on H. P. Lovecraft* (1959; rpt. West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1982), p. xxviii.

2. See my "HPL and HPB: Lovecraft's Use of Theosophy", *Crypt of Cthulhu* No. 5 (Roodmas 1982) 6.

3. "An Appreciation of H. P. Lovecraft" in *Beyond the Wall of Sleep* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1943), p. 456.

4. Donald Wandrei, "Lovecraft in Providence" in August Derleth, ed., *The Shuttered Room and Other Pieces* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1959), pp. 134-35.

5. *Crypt of Cthulhu* No. 32 (St. John's Eve 1985) 48.

All such problems vanish away when we consider the name "Dagon" which appears in the story of that title and later in "The Shadow over Innsmouth". Here we are dealing with the ancient Philistine fertility god, sometimes pictured as a merman. Lovecraft himself makes this explicit; he writes of the terrible truth behind "the Philistine legend of Dagon, the Fish-God". So how was this name (which probably comes from a Semitic word for "rain" or "cloud" pronounced? Day-gon.⁶

To add a bit of complication, let me mention a theory of mine: I think that what we actually have here is another designation for Cthulhu! There are hints aplenty in "The Shadow over Innsmouth", where, for example, Zadok Allen no sooner mentions "Father Dagon" than he bursts forth in cries of "Cthulhu fhtagn! Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'l'yeah wgah-nagl fhtagn." This is, of course, the cultic confession of Cthulhu we hear of first in "The Call of Cthulhu". It means "In his house at R'l'yeah dead Cthulhu waits dreaming." Also, it is said of the Innsmouth Deep Ones that "they would rise again for the tribute Great Cthulhu craved". Cthulhu, then, would seem to be the real object of worship of the "Order of Dagon". "Dagon" is simply a familiar and appropriate name from the Old Testament chosen to mask the secret worship of unknown Cthulhu. Remember, outsiders could take a regularly scheduled bus into Innsmouth, and they must not know what is really happening there; remember, too, how secretive Cthulhu cultists are in "The Call of Cthulhu". We see the same kind of thing in "The Dreams in the Witch House" where what first seems to be more familiar Satan-worship turns out to be the cult of Azathoth and Nyarlathotep. Finally, let us note that the gigantic ichthyic form glimpsed in "Dagon" is identified with that name, and since that story is the prototype for the section of "The Call of Cthulhu" subtitled "The Madness from the Sea",⁷ the fishy titan is Cthulhu's own prototype. So "Dagon" is an alias for Cthulhu.

From a name directly borrowed from the Bible let us turn to Lovecraftian names merely influenced by the Bible. Lovecraft explained that he coined some of his names so as "to suggest—either closely or remotely—certain names in actual history or folklore which have weird or sinister associations connected with them. Thus 'Yuggoth' has a sort of Arabic or Hebraic cast, to suggest certain words passed down from antiquity in the magical formulae contained in Moorish and Jewish manuscripts" (SL IV.386). "Yuggoth" should probably be pronounced as most people do in fact say it, with a short "u" and with the first syllable accented. Lin Carter suggests that one "g" must be pronounced at the end of the first syllable, the other at the start of the second (and so in other names or words like "Shaggai" and "shoggoth" whose Semitic basis is obvious); but Hebrew pronunciation would not necessarily demand this, since the prophet's name "Haggai" (the apparent inspiration for "Shaggai") is spelled phonetically in various Bible dictionaries either as Carter suggests or with only one "g" attached to the first syllable. (Similarly "Haggadah", "Haggith", etc.)

6. On this point the reader may check any Bible dictionary.

7. See my "Dagon" and "The Madness from the Sea", Crypt of Cthulhu No. 9 (Hallowmass 1982) 11-12.

As for "Shaggai", one gets the feeling that Lovecraft intended it to rhyme with Haggai as pronounced "Hag-i" with the first syllable accented and a long "i" in the second. But Haggai can also be pronounced, as one often hears, "Hag-i-i" (short "i", then long "i") or "Hag-ay-i", again ending with a long "i". Presumably Shaggai could rhyme with either of these three syllable versions, and Lovecraft may have intended this.

By the way, in the letter just quoted, Lovecraft also says he wanted "Nug and Yeb" (the "evil twins"—SL V.30) to "suggest the dark and mysterious tone of Tartar and Thibetan folklore" (SL IV.386). This would seem to me to militate against Will Murray's interesting hypothesis that the two names are derived from the Egyptian pair of gods Nut and Geb.⁸ Also cf. the Egyptian "rock tombs of Neb" (Egyptian for "Lord") in "The Outsider". Can Lovecraft have taken this word and the name of Dunsany's prophet Yug and interchanged initial letters to arrive at Nug and Yeb? This would give us an Egyptian connection of sorts, but not with the gods Nut and Geb.

Some names Lovecraft built up from an imagined unearthly root, then giving them a secondary Arabic ring "to account for the transmitting influence of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. Typical *Necronomicon* names are Azathoth, Yog-Sothoth, Shub-Niggurath, etc." (SL IV.387). The first of these names could possibly be derived from a book on alchemy current in Lovecraft's day, Azoth, the Star of the East, though there is no evidence Lovecraft had seen it. The guess of Simon in his preface to his bogus *Necronomicon*⁹ that the name is half Sumerian (Azag = "chief") and half Egyptian (Thoth = god of magic, and so, derivatively, "enchanter") is nonsense. Doubtless Lovecraft had no etymology in mind. Nonetheless, the clue that the name is supposed to have a Semitic ring allows us to pronounce it on analogy with the biblical Anathoth, the hometown of the prophet Jeremiah. Both "a's" are short, the first syllable is accented, and both "th's" are fully pronounced (i.e., neither becomes a simple "t").

In the case of "the frightful name of Yog-Sothoth", Lovecraft gives us some help in a letter to Clark Ashton Smith. He relates how "There are curious speculations in the posthumous papers of the late Randolph Carter, regarding the etymological relationship betwixt the Sath of Sath-og-gwah [Smith's Tsathoggwa], & the Soth of that hideous & indescribable Yog-Soth-oth which Alhazred mentions with such manifest reluctance in the *Necronomicon*" (SL III.242). This tells us that the name is not supposed to be pronounced "Yog-So-thoth", with a long "o" in "So", as in the film *The Haunted Palace*, when Dr. Willett says "Yog-so-thoth". Rather it should be more like the way Wilbur Whateley says it in the film *The Dunwich Horror*, with both "o's" short. This is evident both because of the greater similarity to "Sath" when pronounced this way, and because, since the first "th" is part of the same syllable as "so-", the Semitic pronunciation intended by Alhazred must have been a short "o", as in "Anathoth", "Ashtaroth", etc.

Shub-Niggurath, Lovecraft's fertility goddess, a "cloud-like entity" (SL V.303) which is represented by a black goat, poses some difficulty.

8. Will Murray, "The Natures of Nug and Yeb", *Lovecraft Studies* 3, No. 2 (Fall 1984) 52-59.

9. Simon, *Necronomicon* (New York: Avon Books, 1980), p. xix.

Certain features of the name are indeed Semitic, e.g. the double "g" and the ending "-ath", reminiscent of Gath, the hometown of Goliath. But the substance of the name seems to have been borrowed (whether consciously or not) from Lord Dunsany's "Sheol-Nugganoth". It is hard to resist the conclusion that the syllable "nig", added to the Dunsanian original, is supposed to recall the Latin *niger*, "black", as in "Black Goat of the Woods".

Another name with Dunsanian roots is "Nyarlathotep". As Will Murray has pointed out, there is a very obvious kinship between this name and those of Dunsany's prophet "Alhareth-Hotep" and god "Mynarthitep". The fact that the name came to Lovecraft first in a dream hardly means that it came from a vacuum; just the opposite: his fervent reading of Dunsany must have filled his subconscious mind with Dunsanian influence. Here the pronunciation hinges on whether, in order to preserve the Egyptian suffix "-hotep", we ought to snip the "h" from the preceding syllable, so pronouncing the name "Ny-ar-lat-ho-tep". Since Lovecraft explicitly connects Nyarlathotep with ancient Egypt in the prose poem "Nyarlathotep" (1920) and in the *Fungi from Yuggoth* sonnet "Nyarlathotep" (XXI), this would not be implausible.

But this factor seems to be overruled by the clear analogy with Alhareth-hotep, which has a separate "h", and thus the diphthong "th" before the suffix "-hotep", and with Mynarthitep, which is more naturally pronounced "My-nar-thi-tep" or "Ny-narth-i-tep" and only suggests the "-hotep" suffix (also cf. the frequent Dunsanian name-syllables ending in "th"). In fact, Nyarlathotep is basically just a reshuffling of the letters of Mynarthitep. So probably the name should be pronounced "Ny-ar-lath-o-tep". Where should the accent go? This is hard to say, since Lovecraft only saw the name written in his dream (SL I.160-62). But he must have had something in mind when he used it. Unfortunately the accenting of the sonnet "Nyarlathotep" does not help us because the name is only the title and does not occur in the poem itself! But as Steven J. Mariconda has pointed out, Lovecraft seems often to have written his prose with a sensitivity to how it would sound when read aloud (which he sometimes did for friends).¹⁰

What pronunciation would have used all the syllables of Nyarlathotep to best advantage? I would think it most effective to accent the last syllable, but this is admittedly subjective. It should be noted, however, that David McCallum has recorded two Lovecraft stories which mention Nyarlathotep, and in "The Haunter of the Dark" he says "Ny-yar-la-tho-tep" with a short "o", while in "The Rats in the Walls" he says the name "Ny-yar-lath-o-tep".

We have already mentioned Clark Ashton Smith's furry bat-like toad-god Tsathoggua. Lovecraft became an ardent devotee of this deity, enthusiastically adopting him into the pantheon of the Old Ones, even making him older than Cthulhu ("Thou Who wast ancient beyond Memory/Ere the Stars Spawned Great Cthulhu!" [SL III.185]), a genealogical postulate later contradicted by Smith himself (see his "Genealogical Chart of the Elder Gods").¹¹ Some have been misled by Lovecraft's reference to a creature called "Ossadogowah"

10. Steven J. Mariconda, "H. P. Lovecraft: Consummate Prose Stylist", *Lovecraft Studies* 3, No. 2 (Fall 1984) 43-51.

11. Clark Ashton Smith, *Planets and Dimensions* (Baltimore: Mirage Press, 1973), p. 36.

or "Son of Sadogowah" (= of Tsathoggua) (see his fragment "Of Evil Sorceries Done in New England of Daemons in No Humane Shape", incorporated in August Derleth's *The Lurker at the Threshold*)¹² into pronouncing Tsathoggua "Tsath-o-goo-a". We know Lovecraft, presumably following Smith, pronounced the name "Tsath-o-gwa"; he names this clear in a letter to Smith where he sounds out the name "Tsathoggua, or Sath-og-gwa". In the same letter he gives the variant "g'wah" for the last syllable. The "-gowah" in "Sadogowah" must simply represent a Wampanaug Indian dialect expansion of the syllable "gwah" where Lovecraft himself placed an apostrophe in the variant mentioned above ("g'wah"). Smith, too, had used dialect variants of the name such as the medieval French "Sodagui" (SL IV.388). As for the accent, it would seem most natural to stress the middle syllable.

August Derleth's "Ithaqua" is obviously derivative from Smith's Tsathoggua and so should be pronounced as rhyming with it. Derleth's "Lloigor" (is the Welsh ring, as Colin Wilson notices in "The Return of the Lloigor", supposed to recall Machen? If so, what is Lloigor doing in Asia?) and Zhar are self-pronouncing, while it is a matter of indifference whether one pronounces "Cthugha" as rhyming with an old-time automobile horn ("aw-oog-a!") or as based on "thug" or "ugh!", any of these being appropriate in spirit as well as letter.

Frank Belknap Long's Hounds of Tindalos invite equally the pronunciation "Tin-dalos" or "Tin-dal-os". Long coined the name purely for the effect of fierceness; it has no Greek root, despite the sound. It seems to me that I once heard Long pronounce it with the accent on the first syllable, but later I asked him which he intended, and he said he couldn't remember after all these years.

The name "Chaugnar Faugn" presents one obvious problem: is the "g" in "Faugn" silent? Probably not. "Fawn" seems highly inappropriate for a horrific entity, whether one thinks of Bambi or of the fauns of classical myth. Also, since "Chaugnar Faugn" seems to have been coined under the influence of "Cthulhu fhtagn", one may suspect that the "g" is to be pronounced in a Lovecraftian way, i.e., the "g" indicating a thick guttural accent, not quite a hard "g", but not completely silent either. But one may shortcircuit the whole problem by simply calling this being "Chaugnar" as Long himself does in the poem "When Chaugnar Wakes".

The ranks of the Old Ones are ever-expanding, but let me choose only one more before going on to something else. Lin Carter pronounces "Zoth-Ommog" with all short "o's" and with the accent on the second "o": "Zoth-om-mog." He ought to know, since he spawned this one.

Only a brief word need be said concerning Mythos book titles, as the only difficulty in most cases is that readers may not know the various languages. The French *Cultes des Goules* should be pronounced (more or less) "Kult day Gool". *De Vermis Mysteriis* should be pronounced "Day Vairmis Mister-ee-is". *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* (actually, it has to have the definite article "Die" in front of it, or it would be *Unaussprechliche Kulten*), should

12. For the original text of Lovecraft's fragment see *Crypt of Cthulhu* No. 6 (St. John's Eve 1982) 25-27.

be "oon-ows-shprek-lik-in Kool-tin", making allowances for back-of-the-tongue German "r's" and hard "ch's". *Necronomicon* is simple enough. All three "o's" represent Greek omicrons and so should be short; only the uninitiated will say "Necr-oh-nomicon" or worse yet "Necro-nome-icon". A long "o" would represent the omega, and there are none in the word. (Lovecraft himself gives the Greek spelling in SL III.166.) In *The Book of Eibon*, "Ei-" is pronounced like the long "i", not a long "e". This is clear from the medieval Latin version of the title, *Liber Ivonis* (eye-von-is).¹³ Finally, Ramsey Campbell's *Revelations of Glaaki* should not be said "Glake-eye", but rather "Glohk-ee". In "The Inhabitant of the Lake" someone hears it said, and it sounds like "Glarky, or something like that." (American readers should bear in mind the English accent of the speaker here.)

In conclusion, let us consider just a few place names. Though the names "Dunwich" and "Innsmouth" do not seem particularly unearthly, they are not hard to mispronounce. "Dunwich" should most likely be pronounced "Dunnich" like the old English town of that name, and on analogy with "Greenwich" ("Grinnich"), Norwich, etc. "Innsmouth", being a New England town, should be "Inns-muth" like Portsmouth, not "Inns-mouth" as in "big mouth" or "Inns-mooth" like "vermouth". "R'lyeh" (which, interestingly, Lovecraft originally intended to spell simply "L'yeh") is supposed to be pronounced as one long syllable (not like the word "rely") with the accent at the end.¹⁴

Perhaps at this point the reader expects me to reveal that Lovecraft's "Klarkash-ton" and Bloch's "Luveh-Keraph" are actually the correct phonetic renderings of the names "Clark Ashton Smith" and "Lovecraft", but I will quit before I have completely shattered my credibility. But after our survey of Mythos names and how to say them, at least one thing has become clear: "Truly," as H. P. Lovecraft said, "the problems of the scholarly cosmic initiate are multiple, varied, & complex!" (SL III.242).

13. Thanks to S. T. Joshi for confirmation of this.

14. Lovecraft contemplates calling the "corpse-city" simply "L'yeh" in an unpublished letter to Mrs. F. C. Clark written November 14-19, 1925 (John Hay Library), before he wrote "The Call of Cthulhu". I owe this information to S. T. Joshi.

As to the terminal stress on "R'lyeh", I confess I cannot at present recall where I read this.

Continued from p. 76:

the unmentionable *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, in Olaus Wormius's forbidden Latin translation; a book which I had never seen, but of which I had heard monstrous things whispered" (D 211). In this surely conscious echo of the catalogue of books in "The Fall of the House of Usher", Lovecraft establishes the *Necronomicon* as the acme of all such dreaded volumes. As with Kingsport and Arkham, each new appearance makes Alhazred's wondrous tome seem that much more convincing. Defined only through guarded mentions and rare quoted passages, it will come to assume an air of reality impossible for any actual book. There is nothing comparable in Poe.

On the Emergence of "Cthulhu"

by Steven J. Mariconda



On an afternoon in May 1920, the 29-year-old H. P. Lovecraft sat writing in the apartment he shared with his mother at 598 Angell Street in Providence, R.I. Exhausted, the great American fantasist put his head down on his arm; and, dozing, experienced the following strange dream:

I was in a museum of antiquities somewhere in Providence, talking with the curator, a very old and very learned man. I was trying to sell him an odd bas-relief which I had just modelled myself from clay. The old man laughed at me, and asked what I meant by trying to sell a new thing of my own workmanship to a museum of ancient things. . . . I said:

"Why do you say that this thing is new? The dreams of men are older than brooding Egypt or the contemplative Sphinx, or garden-girled Babylon, and this thing was fashioned in my dreams."

Then the curator bade me shew him my product, which I did. It was of old Egyptian design, apparently portraying priests of Ra in procession. The man seemed horror stricken, and asked in a terrible whisper—"WHO ARE YOU?" I told him that my name was H. P. Lovecraft. . . . He replied "No, no—before that!" I said that I had no other memories before that save in dreams. Then the curator offered me a high price, which I refused; because I saw from his face that he meant to destroy my sculpture as soon as it was his—whereas I wished it hung in the museum. My refusal clearly perturbed the man, who asked me to name my own price. Humorously, I cried "One million pounds sterling!" . . ., when to my amazement the old man did not laugh, but looked only more deeply worried. . . . Then he said in a perplexed, baffled, frightened tone, "I will consult with the directors of the institution—please call a week from today."¹

Somewhat over four years elapse, Lovecraft in the interim moving to New York to marry and look for regular work. On the evening of February 28, 1925, he was relaxing in his rented room at 169 Clinton Street in Brooklyn. Two friends, George Kirk and Samuel Loveman, had just taken their leave. Suddenly, at 9:32 p.m., the two-story edifice was shaken by a powerful earthquake, one which was felt as far away as Toronto. In New York, lamps fell from tables and mirrors from walls; walls themselves cracked, and windows shattered; people fled into the street.² This shock was to have farther-reaching repercussions, however; for it set Lovecraft's imagination in motion, prompting the slow emergence of one of his greatest contributions to phantasy.

1. H. P. Lovecraft to Alfred Galpin and Maurice W. Moe, Dreams and Fancies (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1962), p. 47. The letter is here misdated to December 11, 1934; but cf. SL I.113-17, where a letter written to Rheinhart Kleiner obviously soon after is dated May 21, 1920.

2. Lovecraft, [Diary, 1925], ms., John Hay Library, Brown University; New York Times, March 1, 1925, p. 1.

Both these events, so different in scope and so distantly separated in time and space, were to become part of "The Call of Cthulhu", considered to be among Lovecraft's best works. The lengthy development of the tale is an interesting example of how the Providence writer modified and expanded germinal plot ideas and images before composition. "Cthulhu" was the first of a series of tales (such as "The Whisperer in Darkness" and "The Shadow out of Time") to take an exceptionally long period to come to fruition, and the saga of its development lends insight into Lovecraft's creative imagination.

In the tale as it was finally written, the strange sculpture fashioned in a dream and the February 1925 earthquake—"the most considerable felt in New England for some years"³—would take on a common source, as portents of the rising of the prehuman citadel of Cthulhu from beneath the Pacific. But before we get ahead of ourselves, let us look at the other events leading to the tale's writing.

A few years after Lovecraft dreamed he was a sculptor, he made two entries in his commonplace book. These entries, which he later dated to 1923, show the first thematic indications of what was to come:

110 Antediluvian—cyclopean ruins on lonely Pacific island. Centre of earthwide subterranean witch cult.

111 Ancient ruin in Alabama swamp—voodoo.⁴

The above notes, made one after the other, play important parts in "Cthulhu". The first might even be called the plot-germ, even if it makes no indication of how the tale would be developed or from what angle it would be told. The second was folded into the first, Lovecraft changing the locale from Alabama to Louisiana and making the voodoo ritual a branch of the "earthwide witch cult". The concept of the witch cult is certainly derived from Margaret A. Murray's *Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), which Lovecraft read around the time these entries were made.⁵

After these entries, there undoubtedly were many other images and incidents which found their way into or influenced the tale. One we know of is the 1925 earthquake, and perhaps this event inspired strange dreams in Lovecraft that night, as he had it inspire in the sculptor Wilcox in his tale.

As it happens, about six months go by following the tremor before we hear of any other event in the writing of the story. Having been left largely to himself in New York by his wife's absence in the midwest on business, Lovecraft spent much time with his friends discussing literary matters; and—despite his growing depression over his inability to secure a

3. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu", in *The Dunwich Horror and Others* (Arkham House, 1984), p. 129.

4. Lovecraft, *Commonplace Book*, ed. David E. Schultz (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1987), Vol. 1, p. 7.

5. Lovecraft's letter to Clark Ashton Smith of 9 October 1925 shows Lovecraft had read the *Witch-Cult* by September 1924 at the latest (SL II.28). Another nonfiction influence on "Cthulhu" is the Theosophists, as documented in Robert M. Price's "HPL and HPB: Lovecraft's Use of Theosophy", *Crypt of Cthulhu* No. 5 (Roodmas 1982) 3-9.

position—experienced a small burst of creativity, penning the long "Horror at Red Hook" on 1-2 August 1925 and another story of New York horror, "He", ten days later. Though these tales are by no means among Lovecraft's best, his flare-up of imagination was not quite finished. On waking up the day after writing "He", Lovecraft read some of the ethereal phantasy of Lord Dunsany "to stabilize my recovered creativeness of mood";⁶ that night he went to a gathering of his friends at Reinhart Kleiner's apartment. It was a lengthy session, where the Kalems (so called because the last names of the original group all began with "K", "L", or "M") "talk[ed] avidly" until 4 a.m.⁷ One wonders what was among their topics, for when Lovecraft left his mind was evidently brimful with ideas—reaching back at least as far as 1919 and his strange dream—for yet another weird tale:

Thence I went home—but not to bed, for I had much to write. A new story plot—perhaps a short novel—had occurred to my awakening faculties, & it was imperative to get it down in skeletal details whilst it was fresh. This, of course, was a matter of hours, since I adopted my complete development scheme in full. The writing itself will now be a relatively simple matter—it's to be called "The Call of Cthulhu". . . . This new thing—if it turns out as long as I expect from a mere survey of the ground—ought to bring in a very decent sized cheque—it'll be in three or four parts.⁸

We can draw several conclusions from this letter excerpt. Firstly, Lovecraft had both conceived and named Cthulhu, the octopoid "god" from another cosmic realm. Secondly, in light of the amount of time his work took, he had written either a synopsis or an outline of great length and detail. Also, the structure of the narrative had in some sense been decided upon, since the final product was indeed in three parts or chapters.

What is the "complete development scheme" Lovecraft refers to here? It is likely an embryonic version of the plan outlined in his essay "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction" (tentatively dated to 1932 by S. T. Joshi⁹), which suggests that a synopsis of events in order of narration be prepared *only* after a synopsis of events in order of their chronological occurrence is written.¹⁰ Lovecraft, then, perhaps wrote two synopses that late night in August 1925, and the details of the plot were largely in place.

The writing of the story itself, however, was still a long time to come. In fact, a full year elapsed before Lovecraft undertook composition. He was occupied elsewhere, first and foremost with the writing of his celebrated essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature". He likewise felt unable to devote the time and attention required by his "short novel", for he penned two short and rather conventional tales—"In the Vault" (18 September 1925) and "Cool Air" (March 1926)¹¹ before he sat down to write of Cthulhu.

6. Lovecraft to Lillian D. Clark, 13 August 1925; ms., JHL. Exactly what work of Dunsany Lovecraft read that day is unknown.

7. [Diary, 1925]; ms., JHL.

8. Lovecraft to Lillian D. Clark, 13 August 1925; ms., JHL.

9. S. T. Joshi, "Introduction" to Uncollected Prose and Poetry 3 (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1982), p. 7.

10. The Notes and Commonplace Book of H. P. Lovecraft (Lakeport, CA: Futile Press, 1938; rpt. Necronomicon Press, 1978), p. 1.

11. S. T. Joshi, "A Chronology of Selected Works by H. P. Lovecraft", in Kenneth W. Faig, H. P. Lovecraft: His Life, His Work (Necronomicon Press, 1979), p. 34.

He did, though, plan to write the story at several junctures over the months; once saying in a letter to Clark Ashton Smith under date of 11 November 1925: "The tale of the sunken continent will probably be written during the coming week, & you shall certainly be the first to see it."¹² Another letter of the following week shows that the tale was indeed much on Lovecraft's mind at this time:

Yes—that submerged city in the Caspian is much like the sunken towers which I and other fantastic authors love to write about. I hope to read further reports on it—though I am quite certain they will reveal none of the horrors which will come out of my submerged Pacific city of L'yeh [sic]—which is older than mankind.¹³

Note that Lovecraft emended the name of the dead city where Cthulhu waits dreaming in the story to "R'yeh".

Perhaps Lovecraft was inspired to try finally to write out his tale at the above juncture by his reading of Arthur Machen's *The Three Impostors* and "The Great God Pan", which he began on November 1st and 9th respectively. S. T. Joshi and David E. Schultz have speculated that an episode of the *Impostors*, "The Novel of the Black Seal", influenced "Cthulhu" in that both stories employ the gradual piecing together of information from disparate documents and subnarratives. Internal evidence alone shows this to be true—Lovecraft's narrative is woven of "the queer bas-relief, . . . [and the] disjointed jottings, ramblings, and cuttings"¹⁴ found in a locked box, Machen's from "a lump of black stone, rudely annotated with queer marks and scratches . . . a sheet of manuscript, and . . . some cuttings from obscure local journals"¹⁵ found in a locked bureau. This leaves us to wonder exactly how much of the structure of "The Call of Cthulhu" could have been fleshed out in the writing of the synopsis (or synopses) three months before.

Indeed, the fact that Lovecraft was reading all sorts of weird fiction for the purposes of writing his essay on that subject between the writing of the synopsis and the writing of the story makes for perhaps hundreds of diverse possible influences on his product. One strong influence rarely mentioned by commentators, for example, is Guy de Maupassant's "The Horla". At the lowest level of parallel, the French writer's classic tale of an invisible alien that sways men's minds contains much philosophical musing on man's tenuous place on this planet: "We are so weak, so defenceless, so ignorant, so small, we who live on this particle of mud which revolves in a drop of water."¹⁶ This is a less eloquent, though no less affecting, version of Lovecraft's cosmic perspective as expressed in "Cthulhu". But as Maupassant's story progresses, he writes with more intensity:

12. Lovecraft to Clark Ashton Smith, 4 November 1925; ms., JHL.

13. Lovecraft to Lillian D. Clark, 14-19 November 1925; ms., JHL.

14. *The Dunwich Horror and Others* (Arkham House, 1984), p. 127. Further references are in the text with the abbreviation "DH".

15. Arthur Machen, *The Three Impostors* (New York: Knopf, 1923), p. 80.

16. Guy de Maupassant, "The Horla", in Herbert A. Wise and Phyllis Fraser, eds., *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural* (New York: Random House, 1944), p. 465. Further references are in the text with the abbreviation "GT".

Now I know, I can divine. The reign of man is over, and he has come. He who was feared by primitive man; whom disquieted priests exorcised; whom sorcerers evoked on dark nights, without having seen him appear, to whom the imagination of the transient masters of the world [i.e. man] lent all the monstrous or graceful forms of gnomes, spirits, genii, fairies, and familiar spirits. After the coarse conceptions of primitive fear, more clear-sighted men foresaw it more clearly. . . . They called it magnetism, hypnotism, suggestion—what do I know?

The last sentence reveals another tie-in, for Cthulhu also exerts a mental influence over human beings. Note how Wilcox's dream of a "chaotic sensation which only fancy could transmute to sound" (DH 143) is paralleled by the way Maupassant's narrator perceives the name of his antagonist:

He has come, the—the—what does he call himself—the—I fancy that he is shouting out his name to me and I do not hear him—the—yes—he is shouting it out—I am listening—I cannot—he repeats it—the—Horla—I hear—the Horla—it is he—the Horla—he has come! (GT 467)

Finally, the scope of Maupassant's horror, like Lovecraft's, is global. Both authors use the idea of news items from widely separate locales describing related events to show the pervasiveness of the horror. "The Horla", then, is only one of many stories Lovecraft read during the period, and many other sources of influence can likewise be discovered by those who care to look.

But Lovecraft was again delayed, and not simply by the task of writing "Supernatural Horror in Literature". His declining mental state at being without work and away from his New England background certainly affected his ability to write such a demanding tale as "Cthulhu". Finally returning home to Providence in April 1926, he experienced an astonishing rejuvenation of his story-writing faculties, and the tale was the first in a series of some of his finest works which he began to turn out. He probably did not finish it until September 1926, some eighteen months after the earthquake which set his imagination working, and more than six years after his dream of the newly wrought yet ancient sculpture. On the 12th of October 1926 he wrote Smith: "I've written two new tales, one of which is the sunken-land thing I described in advance last year" (SL II.77).

The joy Lovecraft felt at being back in his native city, which so colored *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1927), is also apparent in "The Call of Cthulhu". Providence locales (notably picturesque Thomas Street, where Lovecraft set the quarters of the sculptor Wilcox) are featured as the starting point for its explorations of trans-cosmic horror. Lovecraft likewise gave his narrator Thurston a first and middle name taken from Brown University past president Francis Wayland (1796-1865).

The story certainly gains from these small touches of local color, and the same may be said in a more general sense of the many other images and ideas known and unknown which Lovecraft must have collected for use in his story over the long period of its gestation. In a sense it is well, too, that Lovecraft never undertook the writing of "Cthulhu" while in New York, for the story is probably the richer in incident and detail for having been written after his return to his home and concomitant renewed spirits and creative ability.

At Lovecraft's Grave

On the Fiftieth Anniversary of Lovecraft's Death

March 15, 1987

by Brett Rutherford

1

*That does not sleep
which can eternal lie,
yet Howard, Old Gent, Ech-Pi-El,
Lovecraft who signed himself
Grandpa and Theobaldus
to his fans and correspondents
most assuredly sleeps here.
We drift into the vale of earth,
the gentle falls and slopes
of Swan Point Cemetery,
gather to remember and praise him
as the Seekonk with its silted memories
ribbons at the edge of vision.
The sculpted monuments
of angels and Psyches
repeat the largesse
of immortal promises—
not so for his simple stone
placed forty years too late
to help his absent-minded shade
come home.*

*Yews and cedars
bluff Ides of March
with bitter green, droop branches
like soiled wigs, while honest
bare branches of an oak tree
retell the long years' chase of sun,
the repeated losses of winter.
Which is the emblem of Lovecraft's sleep?
His life lies stripped
as that sorrowed oak
where his initials are carved
(real or spurious?)*

his nightmares the evergreens,
lingering through seasons,
harboring nightwing
as readily as lark.

2

We stand about, a handful
swelling to nearly a hundred,
trying to envision his folded hands,
his hand-me-down Victorian suit,
wonder how much of his habiliments
have fed the indiscriminate hunger
of the conqueror worm,
his eye sockets empty and dry
gone beyond dreaming
though we close ours and see
the tower of ageless Kadath,
the shark-infested ruins of Ponape,
the imaginal Providence
where he walked arm-in-arm
with Poe and his eccentric Helen.

Our Lovecraft, lord
of the midnight shudder,
eaten from within
by the gnawing shoggoth of poverty,
the Azathoth of squamous cancer,
the loneliness of Nyarlathotep,
drugged by nurses into the sleep
where dreaded night-gaunts fly
and bent flutes warble
a twisted melody—

and yet he faced it stoically
like a proud Roman,
an 18th century gentleman.
Death came with burning eye
and found him not trembling,
never recanting his cosmic vision,
waving away the white-collared cleric
with a wan smile.

3

Hundreds of miles we came today
to pause and pay homage,
readers and scholars who have leafed
his books, studied his papers,
debated his sources and meanings,
traced his footsteps in Gotham

and Boston and Federal Hill,
stood with a thrill
at his one-time door.

In sorry, mean-spirited Providence
no plaque or marker reminds us of him.
His grandfather's estate an empty lot,
his mother's house vanished,
his last abode uprooted and moved
like an aimless chessman on street map,
as though the upright town
with its sky-piercing steeples,
mind-numbing priests,
would like to erase him.

A baby in mother's arms
intrudes on our reminiscing,
breaks Carl Johnson's eulogy
with gurgles and cries of
"R'lyeh! Wah! R'lyeh!"
(shunned name of the city of doom
where multi-tentacled Cthulhu
dictates his madhouse symphonies!)

As Joshi reads sonnet
the sun blinks off
behind a humped shoulder
of cloud,
and the air turns cold,
unnaturally cold
in a spell of seconds.
Earth reels beneath our feet
into the chasm of sunless
space.

4

Ah! this is the moon's business,
or the work of a moonless night.
Should we not speak of him
beneath the glimmer of Hyades,
the velvet pall of the void,
the primal ether in which the cosmos
whirls like a raft into maelstrom,
the vast interior spaces
of Time and the Angles
where the gods as he knew them
drool and chant?

But they will not permit us
to assemble by night.
They seal the gates
against our ghoulish
intrusions,
pretend that the coffined dead
cannot be heard
to turn in their neglected
crypts, deny
that lingering essences
drawn from the memories
of the living can take
an evanescent life—

pale shadows of shadows,
reflected gleams
from the dusty pane
of a mausoleum,
glints from polished granite
or marble,
a sliver of sourceless light
in the eye of an owl
or a raven;

pretend we are not
untuned yet powerful
receivers of thought,
transformers of vision,

as if we did not know
how night
vibrates with poetry,
eidolons plucked
from the minds of the dead.

Reporters and camera crews
take us in warily,
eye us for vampire teeth,
chainsaws, machetes,
jewelry and witches' teats,
wonder what crimes we lust
beneath disguises
to perpetrate
upon their babies,
their wives,
their altars.

We smile,
 keeping our secret of secrets,
how we are the gentle ones,
how terror
is our tightrope over life,
how we alone
 can comprehend
the smile behind the skull.

5

Later a golden moon lifts up,
swollen with age and memories,
passing the veined tree skyline,
leaving its double in Seekonk,
disc face scanning the city—
the antfarm of students on Thayer,
the tumult of traffic on Main,
the aimless stroll of dreamers,
dim lamps of insomniacs,
the empty, quiet graveyard
winking like a fellow conspirator
at the prince of night.

Dimly on obelisk
a third moon rises.
The offered flowers
against the headstone
quiver and part.

A teenaged boy,
backpack heavy
with horror books,
leaps over the wall,
eludes the sleepy
 patrol car,
comes to the grave,

hands shaking
frightened,
exultant,
hitch-hiked all day

waiting,
mouthing the words
of *Necronomicon*,
for a sign
that does not come

the clear night,
the giant moon
throbbing
as he chants:

*That is not dead
which can eternal lie,
And with strange eons
even Death may die.*

Continued from p. 84:

collection of Smith's fragments and miscellany, *Strange Shadows*, will find print someday. Smith will never gain the critical acclaim or popular appeal of Lovecraft; but if we can learn that Smith is more than the author of "The City of the Singing Flame" or "Ubbo-Sathla", then his posthumous triumph will be complete.

BRIEFLY NOTED

The humorist S. J. Perelman (1904-1979) made passing mention of Lovecraft in one of his late *New Yorker* pieces, "Is There a Writer in the House?" (collected posthumously in *The Last Laugh*), but now we have an idea of what Perelman, who grew up in Providence and attended Brown in the early 1920s before moving to New York, actually thought of his fellow Rhode Island author. *Don't Tread on Me: The Selected Letters of S. J. Perelman*, edited by Prudence Crowther (Viking, 1987), contains the following passage from a letter dated October 18, 1976, to Paul Theroux, another writer from southern New England who has alluded to Lovecraft in his works:

Re H. P. Lovecraft who you mentioned—I was dimly aware that he was alive and unwell in Providence while I was being forcibly educated there, but what little work of his I came across was in quasi-horror pulps, kind of sub-Edgar Allan Poe stuff, and seemed pretty spurious to me. The only person I ever knew who had any knowledge of him was a spaced-out freak who worked with the Brown Dramatic Society. . . . From what I read in the alumni magazine a couple of years ago, his red corpuscles gave out and he occupies a headstone somewhere in the verdure near Pawtucket. (p. 319)

—Contributed by Peter Cannon

"The Terrible Old Man": A Deconstruction

by Donald R. Burleson, Ph.D.



he text of Lovecraft's "The Terrible Old Man" (in *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, Arkham House, 1984, pp. 272-75) provides, in the penultimate sentence of the tale, a point of departure for deconstructive reading. Regarding the "idle village gossip" generated by the discovery of three horribly mangled bodies, the Terrible Old Man is said (with contextually obvious irony) to take no interest, because: "He was by nature reserved, and when one is aged and feeble one's reserve is doubly strong." The word *reserve* is capable of two meanings whose mutual semantic tension opens the door to an inquiry into the story's heterogeneities of reading. The primary signification of *reserve* is the quality of being reserved, withdrawn, hermit-like; the secondary signification is: that which is kept in readiness for use when needed.

The literal text at this point semantically supports only the primary meaning, in that the earlier clause of the sentence refers to the old man as "reserved". However, the global narrative itself "reads" the secondary and pun-like meaning into the noun, in that the old man's "peculiar bottles", to which he speaks (presumably evoking the presence of his long-departed colleagues in seafaring carnage), provide a "reserve" of strength that can be called up when necessary. Thus the secondary meaning, no longer really secondary when viewed in light of the story's reader-inferred actions, becomes a point upon which the story is self-conflicting with regard to the penultimate sentence's advancing of the primary meaning. This tendency toward self-subverting content finds, further, overall suggestion in the ironic tone in which the work is narrated throughout, a heavy-handed irony that borders on sarcasm and suggests broad semiotic multiplicity of interpretation. In fact, for instance, the ironic tone with which the penultimate sentence is delivered tends to subvert the subversion: the events of the tale having undercut the sentence's literal insistence on the "primary" signification of *reserve*, the tonal irony then impinges on *this* disagreement to draw the noun's interpretation back closer to the "secondary" meaning and thus question even the story's questioning of itself.

On a superficial level, an obvious dichotomy exists between the views of two groups of people in the tale: the townsfolk of Kingsport, and the robbers, who are "not of Kingsport blood" but rather (as the narrator remarks in parody of the legendary tendency of small New England towns to be clannish) are "of that new and heterogeneous alien stock which lies outside the charmed circle of New England life and traditions. . . ." (The word *heterogeneous*, in light of the ensuing comments here, functions on more than

one level.) The two sides of this dichotomy are related to the two interpretations of the noun *reserve*. The "primary" meaning, that of the quality of being withdrawn, tends to colour the robbers' view of the Terrible Old Man, in that as a recluse (however weird-seeming) he invites their professional ministrations, though not without their momentary misgivings; while the "secondary" meaning, that of a source of power kept in readiness to be pressed into service, works to colour the townsfolk's view of the old man as somehow possessing the potential to be menacing. The correspondence is not precisely one-to-one: the townsfolk are more unified in their response to the old man than are the robbers, whose reactions partake somewhat of both sides of the semantic coin.

The binary difference between the two groups translates, on one level, into a difference between the groups in terms of their respective prevailing attitudes toward the relation between appearance and reality, seeming and being. The townsfolk of Kingsport are frightened of the Terrible Old Man; having, some of them, watched him in his conversations with the bottles, they "do not watch him again". They view him as sinister, and for fear of him they stay away. Thus their actions, of shunning the old man, bespeak a philosophy of belief in *continuity* between appearance and reality; i.e., they evidently think: the old man appears sinister, hence really is to be avoided for one's own good. Tonally, the story's narration itself encourages the reader primarily to go along with this "reading" of the old man by his neighbours.

The robbers Ricci, Czanek, and Silva, though they are outsiders and though they are unimpressed by the old man's physique, know enough of the local lore also to size up the old man, whom to some extent they must take upon his own ground, as appearing sinister; they know the man as one "whom everybody shunned", and when Ricci and Silva meet by the man's front gate, we hear that "they did not like the way the moon shone down upon the painted stones through the budding branches of the gnarled trees. . . ." They have to pluck up courage to subordinate this reaction to the work at hand. The text equivocates on their perception, for while it remarks that "they saw in the Terrible Old Man merely a tottering, almost helpless grey-beard", they clearly entertain nervous feelings about approaching his house; and in any case they know that the townsfolk shun the man. Thus theirs, the robbers', is primarily a position of belief in *discontinuity* between appearance and reality: they know that the old man appears menacing to everyone, yet they believe, and act upon the belief, that in reality the old man is a weak and helpless figure bereft of true potential for menace.

However, this binary opposition between the townsfolk's apparent belief in continuity and the robbers' apparent belief in discontinuity, with regard to appearance and reality, is dismantled by a further level of differences: differences contingent not upon ways in which the two groups differ from each other, but rather upon ways in which each group differs from itself.

The robbers, who believe that the old man's sinister appearance and his fragile reality are split by discontinuity, clearly would not embark upon their mission if they felt themselves in danger; they acknowledge the tendency of the townsfolk to shun the Terrible Old Man, yet they regard

this manner of thinking as a product of fanciful credulousness: they have "more important things to think about than mere idle superstition". To practical and superstition-free robbers, the old man's physical appearance of feebleness is the reality; so that to the extent that they credit the implications of this appearance and decide to act accordingly, they become believers in the *continuity* of appearance and reality. Meanwhile, their belief in *discontinuity* continues in another corner of their minds, when they feel that it is in spite of his sinister appearance that the old man is an easy mark. Their ambivalence about the old man's initial impressions leads them to be divided against themselves and to hold contrary positions together.

The townsfolk, whose belief in the continuity of seeming and being is sufficient to make them shun the old man because he appears frightening, also can scarcely help observing that he is feeble and barely able to walk; so that, to continue to "read" him as a menacing figure they must embrace a position of *discontinuity*: the old man is physically weak, yet the reality must be disconnected from the appearance. Again, one sees ambivalence about the old man's appearance, leading to the townsfolk's holding contrary philosophies that divide themselves from themselves.

Each group, to continue to act as it does—for the townsfolk, to shun the man; for the robbers, to approach him with arrogance—must paradoxically assume to some extent the primary mode of perception attributable to the other group; each group's divided perception is self-complementing, and each half of each group's perception stands in complementation to that of the other group.

The result is that the real differences operative in the work do not fundamentally reside in the apparent bipolarity of view between the two groups (a bipolarity that would shade back into the semantic duality of the noun reserve), because for such to be the case, each group would have to have an unambiguously defined view to serve as one side or the other of the bipolarity; whereas, on the contrary, the view of each group is in fact internally heterogeneous. Rather, the real differences are these internal ones, by which each group is led into paradox by the total impression of the Terrible Old Man himself.

The story itself turns upon the *necessity* of the paradoxes resident in it. If the robbers were consistent in believing in the discontinuity of appearance and reality, they would credit that side of their perceptions which notices that the old man does appear physically helpless, presenting an appearance that might not translate into reality, and conclude that, by the discontinuity, there might well really be enough danger (as suggested antithetically by the old man's local reputation) to discourage the attempt at robbery—hence no story, or at least not *this* story. If the townspeople were consistent in their belief in the continuity between appearance and reality, they would conclude that the old man's feeble appearance, which a part of their perception credits, was a real indication of his nature, and, laughing at their ungrounded fears, they would take the man's strange behaviour as a foible and cease to shun him—destroying, for narrative pur-

poses, the sinister backdrop by which intrigue about the Terrible Old Man builds.

If either the townsfolk or the robbers were consistent believers in a particular relation of continuity or discontinuity, they would annihilate some facet of the story's being—or (since appearances sometimes may and sometimes may not correspond to reality) even if this is a species of consistency to which we may not fairly hold them, the fact remains that if either group had a homogeneous view of the old recluse to begin with, then some facet of the tale would be truncated. In terms of dismantling superficial differences, we may observe that the townsfolk and the robbers, the groups themselves, are more alike than it initially appears (hence a self-referential example of appearance not corresponding to reality), since they both derive ambiguous "readings" from the old man, and since in fact to the extent that the robbers pay attention to that side of their perceptions which sees the old man as physically infirm, which they expect him to be, they partake (at least on the level of self-delusion, ignoring their fears) of the belief in continuity espoused by the other group, calling into question on a new level the previously observed relation of belief-oriented complementation between the two groups. In any event, the work's real differences lie within the ambiguities entertained by each group: their differences with themselves over dominant belief (continuity versus discontinuity), their differences with themselves over the assessment of the old man's nature.

It is not possible for the story to function if either group reasons in a manner free of indwelling paradox, perceptive paradox, paradox in which neither side can stand alone, paradox generated by the heterogeneous nature of the old man himself—who, after all, presents a rich potential for ambivalence, even on the moral level. (Is the Terrible Old Man really so terrible, when he exhibits violence, and only vicarious violence at that, albeit extreme, only when he is himself attacked?) Like the robbers and the townsfolk, we can be mentally divided against ourselves on the question of the old seafarer, about whom it is perhaps significantly symbolic that the narrator comments: "few know his real name", name being metonymy for capacity for logical implication. Indeed, his "real name" in that sense is not knowable in any facile manner, and, if anything, this fact is what makes him "terrible". Perhaps, in appearing at the gate after his supposed slaying, he is symbolically a god reborn. If so, then like all gods he ineluctably is a dispenser of mystery and paradox.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Claudio de Nardi has edited a superb collection of memoirs of Lovecraft, *Vita privata di H. P. Lovecraft* (Reverdito Editore, 1987; 25,000 lire), including the memoirs of Sonia Davis, W. Paul Cook, Samuel Loveman, and others. De Nardi's commentary and annotations are models of scholarship, and many rare photographs and facsimiles grace the volume.

Arkham and Kingsport

by Peter Cannon

[An excerpt from his forthcoming *H. P. Lovecraft*, Twayne Publishers, a division of G. K. Hall, Boston.]

R Perhaps in part because of his great fondness for his native New England, of its natural landscape and colonial architecture in particular, Lovecraft did not immediately recognize its suitability as a setting for supernatural horror. Not until 1920 did it occur to him to look beyond the Gothicism of Poe and the otherworldly fantasy of Dunsany and take inspiration, as had Hawthorne, from the distant past of the region that had fostered them both. Drawing more upon his experiences of life than upon his book reading, Lovecraft began to place New England increasingly at the heart of his fiction. Over the next fifteen years he would succeed in transforming portions of Essex County, Massachusetts, and environs into a territory as mythically potent as Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County or the London of Sherlock Holmes. Granted, Lovecraft's Arkham landscape has little of the dark, psychological complexity of Faulkner's Mississippi, nor can it claim the same nostalgic appeal as the detective's late Victorian England, yet it too has an enduring allure, at any rate for those few blessed with minds of the "requisite sensitiveness."

In these earliest New England tales Lovecraft introduced Kingsport and Arkham, Massachusetts, that pair of fictitious towns of somewhat uncertain provenance. "Vaguely, 'Arkham' corresponds to Salem (though Salem has no college)," he wrote in 1931, "while 'Kingsport' corresponds to Marblehead" (SL III.432). "Vaguely" is the key word in this assertion, for as Will Murray has shown Lovecraft did not consistently identify Arkham as a seaport, and in fact in several cases he seems to have located it well inland.¹ Whereas Kingsport became fixed as a constant as early as "The Festival", Arkham remained a sort of variable, developing over the course of some dozen tales into Lovecraft's quintessential, cosmically haunted New England town. As befits such status, Arkham transcends any one spot on the map.

"The Terrible Old Man" (1920)

Admirers might wish it otherwise, but Lovecraft's bigotry pervades his first tale with a distinct New England setting, "The Terrible Old Man".

1. "In Search of Arkham Country", *Lovecraft Studies* 5 (Fall 1986) 54-67.

Within its brief, tidy, ironical span it shows the same disdain exhibited in the poem "Providence in 2000 A.D." for "that new and heterogeneous alien stock which lies outside the charmed circle of New England life and traditions" (DH 273).² By selecting a diverse national mix for his thieves, "Angelo Ricci and Joe Czanek and Manuel Silva" (DH 272)—Italian, Slav, and Portuguese—Lovecraft at least comes across as impartial in his prejudice. The three robbers, of course, prove no match for the Terrible Old Man, a "tottering, almost helpless greybeard" (DH 273), for he acts as heroic defender of those "New England traditions" that Lovecraft was so keen to preserve. Supernatural horror, at the service of the Yankee establishment, brutally puts the ethnic upstarts in their place.

If "The Terrible Old Man" suffers as heavy-handed polemic, it nonetheless reveals Lovecraft beginning to use realistic New England elements. The title character, "believed to have been a captain of East India clipper ships in his day" (DH 272), sets the pattern for later sea captains like Obed Marsh who engage in dubious traffick in the Pacific and the Far East. He also anticipates in outline a character like old Wizard Whateley, with whom he would appear to share an appreciation of large standing stones: "Among the gnarled trees in the front yard of his aged and neglected place he maintains a strange collection of large stones, oddly grouped and painted so that they resemble the idols in some obscure Eastern temple" (DH 272).³ But where in "The Dunwich Horror" such stones help to call down Yog-Sothoth, here they function as no more than suggestive ornaments. Likewise Kingsport, not yet inspired by any particular New England site, is simply a generic coastal town with street names like "Ship" and "Water".

Even less to Lovecraft's credit is "The Street" (1920), a quasi-poetic attack on "foreign" subversion of Anglo-Saxon America, probably composed within a few months of "The Terrible Old Man" to which it forms a kind of thematic footnote. In this petulant sketch, filled with periphrastic locutions in place of characters, a sole reference to "grave men in conical hats" (D 344) specifically evokes New England, while "The Street" of the title is an idealized conglomeration of Lovecraft's beloved old houses. These buildings, "with their forgotten lore of nobler, departed centuries; of sturdy colonial tenants and dewy rose-gardens in the moonlight", have degenerated by the present into such establishments as "Petrovitch's Bakery, the squalid Rifkin School of Modern Economics, the Circle Social Club, and the Liberty Café", patronized by "alien makers of discord" (D 347), upon whom at the climax they collapse—in a ludicrous display of architecture animated by Lovecraft's own intolerance. Of negligible literary value, "The Street" is of interest chiefly as it reflects its author's conservative reaction to the Red Scare of the period.

2. References to Lovecraft's works appear parenthetically in the text. The corrected sixth printing of The Dunwich Horror (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1984) is abbreviated as "DH"; the corrected fifth printing of Dagon (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1986) as "D".

3. In selecting this particular detail, Lovecraft may have had in mind the example of Timothy Dexter (1747-1806), "or Lord Timothy Dexter, as he lov'd to be call'd", a wealthy New England eccentric whom Lovecraft described in 1923 as "still the principal topik of interest in Newburyport" (SL I.225). Dexter erected a collection of painted wooden statues of historical notables in the frontyard of his Newburyport mansion.

"The Picture in the House" (1920)

"The Picture in the House", after the false starts of "The Terrible Old Man" and "The Street", stands as Lovecraft's first tale effectively to employ local New England color. Here Arkham makes its debut, though the action occurs outside the town, in the general region of the "Miskatonic Valley", where the anonymous narrator, the first of his sober-minded scholars, is "in quest of certain genealogical data" (DH 117). The time for the tale's action—November 1896—may not be as irrelevantly specific as the April eleventh date for the thieves' call upon the Terrible Old Man, since such precision would be in keeping with the protagonist's pedantry.

The opening paragraph, an outstanding example of Lovecraftian bombast, sets forth what amounts to a declaration of aesthetic independence:

Searchers after horror haunt strange, far places. For them are the catacombs of Ptolemais, and the carven mausolea of the nightmare countries. They climb to the moonlit towers of ruined Rhine castles, and falter down black cobwebbed steps beneath the scattered stones of forgotten cities in Asia. The haunted wood and the desolate mountain are their shrines, and they linger around the sinister monoliths on uninhabited islands. But the true epicure in the terrible, to whom a new thrill of unutterable ghastliness is the chief end and justification, esteems most of all the ancient, lonely farmhouses of backwoods New England; for there the dark elements of strength, solitude, grotesqueness, and ignorance combine to form the perfection of the hideous. (DH 116)

With this manifesto Lovecraft serves notice that he will rely less upon stock Gothic backgrounds and will turn more and more to his own New England as a source for horror.⁴

From this rhetorical height the narrative voice shifts smoothly to a broad view of these backwoods houses and their degenerate inhabitants, who "cowered in an appalling slavery to the dismal phantasms of their own minds" (DH 117), thus rooting the story proper in authentic Puritan psycho-history. In contrast to "The Street", the sentient quality of these houses keeps within credible bounds. When the narrator says of the "antique and repellent wooden building" in which he takes refuge, "Honest, wholesome structures do not stare at travellers so slyly and hauntingly" (DH 117), he is revealing not the objectivity of his judgment but the sensitivity of his imagination. Like Lovecraft, he can be at once the rationalist and the romantic.

From fanciful impression the narrator goes on to give an exact and naturalistic description of the exterior and interior of the house. Such

4. In 1930 Lovecraft showed his understanding of Puritan psychology in a letter to Robert E. Howard: "It is the night-black Massachusetts legendry which packs the really macabre 'kick'. Here is material for a really profound study in group-neuroticism; for certainly, no one can deny the existence of a profoundly morbid streak in the Puritan imagination. What you say of the dark Saxon-Scandinavian heritage as a possible source of the atavistic impulses brought out by emotional repression, isolation, climatic rigour, and the nearness of the vast unknown forest with its coppery savages, is of vast interest to me; inasmuch as I have often both said and written exactly the same thing! Have you seen my old story 'The Picture in the House'? If not, I must send you a copy. The introductory paragraph virtually sums up the idea you advance" (SL III.174-75).

finely observed details as the contents of the library shelf—"an eighteenth-century Bible, a *Pilgrim's Progress* of like period, illustrated with grotesque woodcuts and printed by the almanack-maker Isaiah Thomas, the rotting bulk of Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*" (DH 119)—vividly contribute to the mood of sinister antiquity. The character of the narrator, through such erudite particulars as his recognition of Pigafetta's *Regnum Congo*,⁵ "written in Latin from the notes of the sailor Lopez and printed at Frankfort in 1598" (DH 119), emerges just enough to be convincing. His host, another menacing, preternaturally aged individual like the Terrible Old Man (though robust in physique, thanks to his diet of human flesh), speaks in an exaggerated, archaic dialect—" 'Ketched in the rain, be ye?' he greeted" (DH 120)—that contrasts nicely with the civilized diction of the narrator. Their exchange is an early instance of Lovecraft's restricting quoted speech to a monologue: typically, to a rustic's account of strange goings-on given to a learned narrator who never records his side of the conversation. If this technique allowed Lovecraft to avoid the dialogue for which he felt he had no talent, it also helped him to tell his tales with considerable economy. Here, as in all his better first-person narratives, dialogue never obtrudes upon that intimate mental contact the narrator establishes with the reader.

At the climax, with a finesse unknown to those present-day horror writers who delight in explicit violence, Lovecraft suggests the worst through "a very simple though somewhat unusual happening" (DH 123): the tiny spattering of blood onto the open book page that causes the narrator to look up to the ceiling and see "a large irregular spot of wet crimson which seemed to spread even as I viewed it" (DH 124). Unlike narrators of later tales, he has no time for philosophical ruminations in face of such gruesome evidence, as fate intervenes in the next moment in the form of "the titanic thunderbolt of thunderbolts; blasting that accursed house of unutterable secrets and bringing the oblivion that alone saved my mind" (DH 124). This *deus ex machina* ending, trite though it may be, in effect reduces the tale to a nightmare from which the narrator suddenly awakes when the danger becomes too much to bear. His survival unhurt amid the blackened ruins of the house is nothing miraculous for one in a dream. After the careful realism and subtle plot development leading up to this denouement, Lovecraft wisely refrains from any overt dream explanation. Such restraint helps make "The Picture in the House", however conventional its cannibal theme, the strongest of Lovecraft's early New England tales.

"Herbert West—Reanimator" (1921-22)

"I am become a Grub-Street hack," declared Lovecraft in announcing his first professional story project. "My sole inducement is the monetary re-

5. As S. T. Joshi shows in "Lovecraft and the *Regnum Congo*" (*Crypt of Cthulhu* 4 [Yuletide 1984] 13-17), Lovecraft derived his information for this tale, some of it inaccurate, from Thomas Henry Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature and Other Anthropological Essays* (New York, 1902). Like his God of fiction, Lovecraft was guilty at times of getting his knowledge secondhand.

ward" (SL I.157). When George Houtain, the editor of *Home Brew* magazine, made him the offer, the hitherto amateur gentleman gamely enough set aside his ideals and produced the six self-contained episodes that together constitute "Herbert West—Reanimator". As perhaps his most contrived work of fiction, it adds up to an awkward and repetitious whole. No doubt length restrictions put a strain on his invention. For example, the account of the thing that had been Dr. Allan Halsey, "public benefactor and dean of the medical school of Miskatonic University" (D 143), running amok for three days and killing a total of nineteen Arkham residents might have been less grotesquely comic had it not been so compressed. That Lovecraft later condemned "Herbert West" as "my poorest work—stuff done to order for a vulgar magazine, & written down to the herd's level" (SL I.201), however, should not obscure the fact that the plot, which builds in neat, logical increments from one section to the next, took some skill to construct. Within an artificial framework lies an ingenious tale, as lurid and lively as any of Robert E. Howard's pulp action yarns that would so excite *Weird Tales* readers later in the decade.

As monomaniacally as Captain Ahab seeks the white whale, Herbert West strives to perfect his corpse-reanimating techniques, assisted by the compliant, Ishmael-like narrator, until undone by his unholy creations. Of course, on the scale of Faustian fiction "Herbert West" is closer in value to *Frankenstein* than to *Moby-Dick*, yet by selecting a pseudo-scientific premise in accord with his own philosophical views—West's theories "hinged on the essentially mechanistic nature of life" (D 134)—Lovecraft shows some degree of seriousness. Says the narrator: "Holding with Haeckel that all life is a chemical and physical process, and that the so-called 'soul' is a myth, my friend believed that artificial reanimation of the dead can depend only on the condition of the tissues; and that unless actual decomposition has set in, a corpse fully equipped with organs may with suitable measures be set going again in the peculiar fashion known as life" (D 134). In the same letter to Frank Belknap Long in which Lovecraft mentions his progress on the serial, he advises him to read Ernst Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* "before placing too much credence in any vague and unexplainable force of 'life' beyond the ordinarily known mechanical forms" (SL I.158).

Emphasizing action over atmosphere, Lovecraft provides little local color. The first two sections, stocked with references to such new Arkham sites as Meadow Hill and Christchurch Cemetery, contain none of the architectural and historical detail that enriches "The Picture in the House". Only Miskatonic University, in its initial appearance, assumes any character—primarily as the institution where Herbert West and the narrator get started in their profane medical researches. Parts three and four transpire in nearby Bolton, an inexplicable use of an actual Massachusetts town northeast of Worcester, though again it might be any mill town in the region.⁶ Only in the sixth and concluding section, after a grisly interlude behind the front in Flanders in part five, does Lovecraft make a passing

6. What prompted Lovecraft's use of Bolton remains unknown. For speculation on the problem see Donald R. Burleson's *H. P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 157.

attempt to particularize setting. Having finally settled "in a venerable house of much elegance, overlooking one of the oldest burying-grounds in Boston" (D 160), West is back on familiar ground—that is, below it. In the process of having a subcellar dug out for his laboratory, he discovers some "exceedingly ancient masonry" that he calculates must form a "secret chamber beneath the tomb of the Averills, where the last interment had been made in 1768" (D 160). Even in his hack work Lovecraft could not resist slipping in an antiquarian touch or two.

Such incidental features redeem a tale like "Herbert West", as is true of his weaker efforts in general, imbuing it with a certain naive charm. Only in a Lovecraft story could two young men not pursue attractive female specimens for their experiments, remaining bachelors for seventeen years, all without a hint of deviant sexual behavior. (In 1985 Hollywood would supply the missing sex element in its gory if good-natured film version, *Re-animator*.) If "Herbert West—Reanimator" represents an unnatural detour from Lovecraft's own development, it nonetheless shows how entertainingly he could write when compelled to satisfy someone else's story requirements.

"The Unnamable" (1923)

With "The Unnamable" Lovecraft returned to the vein begun in "The Picture in the House", adapting a bit of New England folklore out of Cotton Mather's "chaotic *Magnalia Christi Americana*" (D 203), of which he possessed an ancestral copy. The narrator, Lovecraft's persona Randolph Carter (referred to only as "Carter"), is, in a touch of self-parody, an author of weird fiction. With his friend "Joel Manton",⁷ "principal of the East High School, born and bred in Boston and sharing New England's self-satisfied deafness to the delicate overtones of life" (D 201), Carter conducts a stilted debate over the existence of the "unnamable", while "sitting on a dilapidated seventeenth-century tomb in the late afternoon of an autumn day at the old burying-ground in Arkham" (D 200). In a letter answering some small matters of the tale's obscure plot, Lovecraft noted that there was "actually an ancient slab half engulfed by a giant willow tree in the middle of the Charter St. Burying Ground in Salem" (SL II.139). References to the Salem witchcraft in the tale itself also connect Arkham to the venerable Essex County seaport.

As in "The Picture in the House", the narrator hints at horrors in colonial Massachusetts far worse than any known to the history books:

It had been an eldritch thing—no wonder sensitive students shudder at the Puritan age in Massachusetts. So little is known of what went on beneath the surface—so little, yet such a ghastly festering as it bubbles up putrescently in occasional ghoulis glimpes. The witchcraft terror is a horrible ray of light on what was stewing in men's crushed brains, but even that is a trifle. There was no

7. Just as the character Harley Warren corresponds to his friend Sam Loveman in "The Statement of Randolph Carter", so Lovecraft may have had a friend in mind for Manton, possibly his amateur colleague, Maurice W. Moe, who was a school teacher.

beauty; no freedom—we can see that from the architectural and household remains, and the poisonous sermons of the cramped divines. And inside that rusted iron strait-jacket lurked gibbering hideousness, perversion, and diabolism. Here, truly, was the apotheosis of the unnamable. (D 203)

Unlike "The Picture in the House", however, "The Unnamable" fails to deliver the horrors such an assertion promises, being nearly as stagey and static as that poorest of Sherlock Holmes stories, "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone". Carter may boast that his tale "The Attic Window" led to the removal of the magazine it appeared in from the stands in many places "at the complaints of silly milksops" (D 202), but, judging from his smug, inappropriately offhand manner, his "lowly standing as an author" (D 200) is not undeserved. Indeed, the uncharacteristic use of dialogue suggests that again on some parodic level Lovecraft may have conceived the tale as more Carter's than his own.

Manton's impressionistic description of the monster that shows up from nowhere at the climax to gore them like a bull, "a gelatin—a slime . . . the pit—the maelstrom" (D 207), incongruously mixes the viscous and the literary, as it confirms rather too patly Carter's belief in the impossibility of naming the unnamable. Lovecraft will link shoggoths and Poe less crudely in *At the Mountains of Madness*.

"The Festival" (1923)

More than seven years after his initial visit to Marblehead, Massachusetts, Lovecraft wrote: "God! Shall I ever forget my first stupefying glimpse of MARBLEHEAD'S huddled and archaic roofs under the snow in the delirious sunset glory of four p.m., Dec. 17, 1922!!! I did not know until an hour before that I should ever behold such a place as Marblehead, and I did not know until that moment itself the full extent of the wonder I was to behold. I account that instant—about 4:05 to 4:10 p.m., Dec. 17, 1922—the most powerful single emotional climax during my nearly forty years of existence" (SL III.126). Such a declaration, while it should not be taken wholly at face value, can be considered an honest expression of Lovecraft's preference for emotions of purely aesthetic origin to those generated by human relationships. In particular, it indicates as none of his direct comments on the matter do why his marriage in the interval was doomed.

"The Festival" marks Lovecraft's first and most literal attempt to recapture in fiction the ecstasy prompted by the sight of a well-preserved New England town of colonial vintage. The unnamed narrator, as he nears Kingsport by foot at "Yuletide", experiences architectural rapture of an intensity far beyond any felt by the narrator of "The Picture in the House":

Then beyond the hill's crest I saw Kingsport outspread frostily in the gloaming; snowy Kingsport with its ancient vanes and steeples, ridgepoles and chimneys—pots, wharves of small bridges, willow-trees and graveyards; endless labyrinths of steep, narrow, crooked streets, and dizzy church-crowned central peak that time durst not touch; ceaseless mazes of colonial houses piled and scattered at all angles and levels like a child's disordered blocks; antiquity hovering on grey wings over winter-whitened gables and gambrel roofs; fanlights and small-paned windows one by one gleaming out in the cold dusk to join Orion and the archaic stars. (D 209)

Lovecraft used such similar phrases as "small buildings heap'd about at all angles and all levels like an infant's blocks" (SL I.204) to describe Marblehead in a letter to Reinhart Kleiner dated 11 January 1923, suggesting a common set of notes for both the letter and the tale that was to follow later in the year.

As in "The Lurking Fear", something is odd about an entire community: "they were strange, because they had come as dark furtive folk from opiate southern gardens of orchids, and spoken another tongue before they learnt the tongue of the blue-eyed fishers" (D 209). Here Lovecraft resorts to the flowery language of dreamland, but for no other purpose than to distinguish the inhabitants of Kingsport from more traditional Puritan settlers. Their background and motives remain vague. Unlike the ghouls of "Pickman's Model", these "dark furtive folk" have no real stake in the scene set out so lovingly in the first part of the story. After all the effort put into the creation of the mood picture of the antique town, Lovecraft seems to have been too exhausted to devise a horrific premise of equal power.

In this perhaps most Hawthornesque of Lovecraft's tales, the narrator has been called, like the title character of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown", to attend a Sabbath rendezvous.⁸ There he experiences a hideous revelation, discovering not that he belongs to a fallen brotherhood of man but that his own ancestors are evil, reanimated corpses—a far less profound insight, to say the least, than that gained by Goodman Brown. Faced with conventional monsters he reacts with conventional fear, his responses bordering on the illogical. While in the cavern below the church he regards with comparative calm the "tame, trained, hybrid winged things" that are "not altogether crows, nor moles, nor buzzards, nor ants, nor vampire bats, nor decomposed human beings", yet he flings himself into the oily, underground river only after the mask of the old man who has guided him slips and he glimpses "what should have been his head" (D 215), an arguably less frightening vision.

"The Festival", overwritten and melodramatic though it may be, especially at its climax, does have value as more than just an atmospheric study. In "Herbert West" an artificial head had allowed a reanimated corpse missing the genuine item to pass among the living, while in "The Festival", a bit more plausibly, a waxen mask and gloves serve to hide the decay of what had once been human. This face-hands deception motif will reappear as a vital plot feature in "The Whisperer in Darkness" and "Through the Gates of the Silver Key", and less centrally in "The Dunwich Horror", where the relatively normal face and hands of Wilbur Whateley disguise his fundamentally alien nature. The colonial house in "The Festival", like that in "The Picture in the House", holds a library of ancient books but of a plainly sinister import: "I saw that the books were hoary and mouldy, and that they included old Morryster's wild *Marvellis of Sciencé*, the terrible *Saducismus Triumphatus* of Glanvill, published in 1681, the shocking *Daemonolatrea* of Remigius, printed in 1595 at Lyons, and worst of all, (continued on p. 53)

8. For a discussion of the parallels between the two tales see my "H. P. Lovecraft in Hawthorian Perspective" in H. P. Lovecraft: *Four Decades of Criticism*, ed. S. T. Joshi (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), pp. 161-65.

A Probable Source for the Drinking Song from "The Tomb"

by Will Murray



H. P. Lovecraft fancied himself a poet. In the early days of his amateur journal associations, he composed hundreds of pieces of verse written in the Georgian eighteenth-century style. Only as a letter writer was Lovecraft more prolific. Although Lovecraft later outgrew his eighteenth-century affectations, his more mature attempts at poetry never garnered him the long-sought reputation that, say, his contemporary Clark Ashton Smith was to achieve. Lovecraft's more contemporary verse, like "My Favourite Character" or "Lament for a Vanished Spider", is too often inconsequential stuff. Only his weird poetry, like "The Ancient Track" or his magnum opus in this vein, the *Fungi from Yuggoth* sonnet cycle, have merited close study. Even there, critical assessment is decidedly mixed.

History has not been kind to Lovecraft's verse. His eighteenth-century effusions are all but dismissed by even his more ardent admirers. Even Lovecraft eventually dismissed them as "a mass of mediocre and miserable junk" (SL I.60). And his more potent poems, collected together, make only the slimmest of volumes.

There is one poem, however, that has long puzzled Lovecraft scholars. This is what is called "The Drinking Song". A broad and boisterous paean to lusty living, as well as a shout of defiance at the inevitability of death, "The Drinking Song" appeared in the 1917 horror story, "The Tomb". It is unlike any other poem Lovecraft ever wrote. Indeed, with its unabashed praise for drinking and wncing and living for the moment, it is utterly unlike the sedate Lovecraft. It could have easily come from the swashbuckling pen of Robert E. Howard.

As an example of this kind of rhyme, it is actually quite good—for Lovecraft. It is rollicking, lively, and the only hints of the true Lovecraft contained in its lines are the grim refrains about inescapable death.

As far as is known today, "The Drinking Song" first appeared, untitled, in "The Tomb", when it was first published in *The Vagrant* in 1922. In later years, August Derleth extracted it to fill out Lovecraft's slim *Collected Poems*, where it was entitled—by Derleth—"The Drinking Song from The Tomb." Readers unfamiliar with the original story might have inferred that the song itself was literally from a tomb, giving the work a meaning Lovecraft did not intend.

In truth, the so-called "Drinking Song" was not written specifically for the story, but was composed separately—probably well before "The Tomb". If it was ever published by itself, its initial appearance has not been

uncovered. In its first form it survives as a holograph manuscript now reposing in the John Hay Library with Lovecraft's other papers. In its original form, it had a title of its own, "Gaudeamus", which is Latin and means "Let Us Delight". Or more colloquially, "Let's Party!"

Lovecraft's inspiration for "Gaudeamus" is unknown. Obviously, from what we know of his life and personal habits, Lovecraft did not go out drinking and wenching, only to compose "Gaudeamus" under the influence of a morning-after hangover. One has difficulty imagining Lovecraft writing it from scratch, or in an excess of good cheer.

The truth may be that Lovecraft was writing a pastiche on a similar piece of revelry. After all, many of Lovecraft's early poetic exhalations were blind pastiches of a defunct school of verse.

The true inspiration of "Gaudeamus" may have come from a dark book, published in Puritan Massachusetts in the seventeenth century and suppressed by the Puritan fathers as an "unfriendly book".¹

In my article, "Dagon in Puritan Massachusetts",² I discussed the matter of the Puritan rascal Thomas Morton, who built a Druidic maypole on a hill called Merry Mount in Quincy, Massachusetts, circa 1627, around which pagan rites were held until the Puritan Separatists, offended by his excesses, scattered Morton and his followers and felled the maypole. That accomplished, they renamed the hill Mount Dagon and ultimately sent Morton back to England.

But in later years Morton returned to New England, and produced a memoir of his days as "Mine Host of Merry Mount". He called this book *New English Canaan* or *New Canaan*. The Puritans, unhappy with Morton's return, were even unhappier at the prospect of the book's publication. It was confiscated and Morton jailed.

It is difficult now to understand why the book was suppressed. *New English Canaan* is divided into three books, the first two of which are an abstract of Massachusetts as it was in those early days, and dwells at great length on the social customs and benevolence of the native Indians. (Morton had been accused of selling guns and liquor to them, which resulted in the murders of several Puritan settlers.) Only in the third and final book does Morton relate his version of the events at Merry Mount.

Beneath the semi-pious rationalizations and solemn denials of wrongdoing, there is a twinkle in the prose that indicates that Morton was still poking fun at the humorless and unforgiving Puritans even years later, and that is probably what angered the sensitive Massachusetts Separatists.

In the course of explaining his erecting of the maypole, Thomas Morton attempted to put to rest the dark rumors that had attended his revels and later caused Governor Endicott to send a force of armed men up from Plymouth to rout the entire Merry Mount settlement. Perhaps disingenuously, Morton portrayed the revels as harmless fun and the equivalent to a modern-day beer party.

1. William Churchill Edwards, *Historic Quincy, Massachusetts* (Quincy: City of Quincy, 1954), p. 16.

2. *Lovecraft Studies*, 4, No. 2 (Fall 1985) 66-70.

Morton wrote: "There was . . . a merry song made, which (to make their Revells more fashionable) was sung with a Corus, every man bearing his part; which they performed in a Daunce, hand in hand about the Maypole, whiles one of the Company sung, and filled out the good liquor like gammedes and Jupiter."³

Morton reproduced the song, which he called, simply, "The Songe" in his *New English Canaan*, and the resemblance between it and the so-called "Drinking Song" is remarkable. Fully to appreciate the similarities, the reproduction of Lovecraft's poem, described by him in "The Tomb" as "a bit of Georgian playfulness never recorded in a book", is warranted:

[GAUDEAMUS]

Come hither, my lads, with your tankards of ale,
And drink to the present before it shall fail;
Pile each on your platter a mountain of beef,
For 'tis eating and drinking that bring us relief:
So fill up your glass,
For life will soon pass;
When you're dead ye'll ne'er drink to your king or your lass!

Anacreon had a red nose, so they say;
But what's a red nose if ye're happy and gay?
Gad split me! I'd rather be red whilst I'm here,
Than white as a lily—and dead half a year!
So Betty, my miss,
Come give me a kiss;
In hell there's no innkeeper's daughter like this!

Young Harry, propp'd up just as straight as he's able,
Will soon lose his wig and slip under the table;
But fill up your goblets and pass 'em around—
Better under the table than under the ground!
So revel and chaff
As ye thirstily quaff:
Under six feet of dirt 'tis less easy to laugh!

The fiend strike me blue! I'm scarce able to walk,
And damn me if I can stand upright or talk!
Here, landlord, bid Betty to summon a chair;
I'll try home for a while, for my wife is not there!
So lend me a hand;
I'm not able to stand,
But I'm gay whilst I linger on top of the land!

Compare that to Morton's original:

3. Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan or New Canaan* (Amsterdam: Jacob Frederick Stams, 1637), p. 134.

THE SONGE

Drinke and be merry, merry, merry boyes,
Let all your delight be in Hymens joyes,
Io to Hymen now the day is come,
About the merry Maypole take a Roome.
 Make greene garlons, bring bottles out;
 And fill sweet Nectar, freely about,
 Uncover thy head, and feare no harme,
 For hers good liquor to keepe it warme.
Then drinke and be merry, &c.
Iô to Hymen, &c.
 Nectar is a thing assign'd,
 By the Deities owne minde,
 To cure the hart opprest with griefe,
 And of good liquor is the cheife,
Then drinke, &c.
Iô to Hymen, &c.
 Give to the Mellancholly man,
 A cup or two of 't now and than;
 This physick' will soone revive his bloud
 And make him be of a merrier moode.
Then drinke &c.
Iô to Hymen &c.
 Give to the Nymphe thats free from scorne,
 No Irish; stuff nor Scotch over worne,
 Lasses in beaver coats come away,
 Yee shall be welcome to us night and day.
To drink and be merry &c.
Iô to Hymen, &c.

The similarities between the Morton and the Lovecraft "songs" are too clear to dissect and belabor here, other than to point out the obvious fact that the two works share a like cadence and style. In the case of Lovecraft's piece, there is a morbid undertone of doom attesting to the temporariness of even the most pleasurable aspects of life, and the futility of believing in the temporal happiness which Morton appears to embrace.

A solid influence between the Morton poem and the Lovecraft verse cannot be established with absolute certainty. Lovecraft, a keen student of New England history, was no doubt aware of Thomas Morton and his escapades, and he could hardly have failed to have encountered what is a very important early American book, the *New English Canaan*, in his literary explorations. Indeed, he mentions Morton in several of his letters. And his fondness for archaic books, especially those printed with the long "s" (of which Morton's tome is one), is legendary. But whether Lovecraft read *New English Canaan* prior to his composing "Gaudeamus" is a question that cannot be answered here. But the sheer atypicality of "Gaudeamus" argues for a specific model that inspired it, and Thomas Morton's "The Songe" fits the bill to perfection.

Reviews

H. P. LOVECRAFT. *Medusa and Other Poems*. Edited by S. T. Joshi. (*Crypt of Cthulhu* #44.) Mount Olive, NC: Cryptic Publications, 1986. iv, 72 pp. \$4.50 pb. Reviewed by Steven J. Mariconda.

Lovecraft's poetry is the least controversial aspect of his life and work—nearly everyone agrees that it is bad. But instead of generalizing—as Darrell Schweitzer chose to do in his *Dream Quest of H. P. Lovecraft* by opening his chapter on the verse, "The less said about Lovecraft's poetry, the better"—let us be more specific. Real poetic fire is present in some of Lovecraft's verse, autobiographical or historical interest in most of it, and nearly all of it is technically perfect. These are indeed reasons enough to merit the joint effort of Robert M. Price, indefatigable publisher, and S. T. Joshi, indefatigable editor, in bringing us this collection of the remaining unprinted poetry.

It is not difficult to say why most of Lovecraft's early verse is so poor; many of the poems presented here, in fact, offer the answer quite clearly. We find not the delineation of an alternately awe- and horror-inspiring universe, or the questing for "unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it", as we do in the fiction. Instead, we wade through passionless verses on the ethos of New England and the rest of Anglo-Saxondom. Lovecraft himself was well aware of his shortcomings, even at an early date—he signed a revision of 1915 as "Howard P. Lovecraft, Metrical Mechanic"—and when he finally dropped his poetic affectations in the last decade of his life he admitted to a correspondent that he wrote this type of verse "as a means of recreating around me the atmosphere of my beloved 18th century favourites".

So why bother to reprint, or (especially) to read it? One reason is the dazzling facility Lovecraft had with the heroic couplet. His work in this form is mostly flawless in rhyme and shows a masterful command of meter. Lovecraft's defense of the couplet in "Metrical Regularity" (1915) as "capable of taking on infinite shades of expression by the right selection and sequence of words, and by the proper placing of the caesura or pause in each line" is borne out by such efforts here as "Content", "Ver Rusticum", and even "Lines for Poets' Night at the Scribbler's Club", which shifts abruptly from its occasional tone to a dramatic description of Samuel Love-man's poetry:

Palace and temple, plinth and colonnade;
Ewer of gold, goblet of carven jade;

Wing'd brazen lion, sphinx of diorite,
And marble faun, an ode of living light;
Ionian moonbeams, bow'rs of Naxian vines,
Weird trains of Maenads, drunk with Thasian wines,
Rites that the gods themselves half fear'd to see,
And fever'd pomps of Phrygian sorcery;
Vista of cities in the sunset clouds,
Black halls of Pharaohs in their nighted shrouds; [. . .]

There is music in many of these early pieces, then, but again what is missing is what Lovecraft (echoing Arthur Machen's *Hieroglyphics*) called "a certain degree of concentrated ecstasy in the creator". It is this "ecstasy" that informs "The Music of Erich Zann", "The Colour out of Space", and, yes, certain of the *Fungi from Yuggoth*.

We need not search quite so carefully for the merits of Lovecraft's satiric and humorous verse, well represented here by "Ad Criticos" (printed complete for the first time), the insightful self-parody "On the Death of a Rhyming Critic", "Theobaldian Aestivation", "Medusa: A Portrait", "The Feast", and others. These are amusing mostly because of the way Lovecraft works the grotesque contrast between form and content. We still have the dignified procession of couplets, but now comprised of colloquial language and incongruous imagery. "The Power of Wine: A Satire", one of the funniest things of any kind ever written by Lovecraft, provides an example:

How great the pow'r of Wine to beautify
The manly form, and please th' exacting eye!
What graceful steps the polish'd drunkard knows!
How sweetly can he on the road repose!
The flaming face, the gently leering stare,
Bespatter'd clothing, and disorder'd hair,
The od'rous breath, and incoherent voice,
All charm our fancy, and increase our joys.

Another reason the satiric poetry is so amusing is Lovecraft's use of the couplet form to spring his punchlines (so to speak) when, lulled by the flowing meter, we least expect it. Note, for example, "On the Death of a Rhyming Critic":

Tho' much by ancient notions marr'd,
He was a fairly clever bard;
His numbers smooth enough would roll,
But after all—he had no soul!

The first three end-stopped lines set up the fourth, with its dash (caesura) and exclamation point for even more "punch".

In this volume there are also a few verses of serious intent worth reading. "Amissa Minerva" was penned during the author's early battle

against free verse. In theme it is of a piece with such essays as "The Vers Libre Epidemic", "Metrical Regularity", and "The Allowable Rhyme"; in content it was influenced by Horace's *Ars Poetica* and Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (for more on this see my annotation of the poem in a forthcoming issue of R. Alain Everts' *Etchings & Odysseys*). There is much poignancy and philosophical interest in "To an Infant", which advises its addressee that "Your dreams are yourself, so tend them as all that preserves you free". The three poems that make up "A Cycle of Verse" have some powerful imagery and evoke more of true fear than most of the pieces in Lovecraft's famous sonnet sequence. In one, "Mother Earth", the narrator explores a familiar Lovecraftian wood, complete with grotesque vegetation and glyph-carved rocks, finally hearing in the trickle of hidden water a warning:

"Mortal, ephemeral and bold,
In mercy keep what I have told,
Yet think sometimes of what hath been,
And sights these crumbling rocks have seen;
Of sentience old ere thy weak brood
Appear'd in lesser magnitude,
And living things that yet survive,
Tho' not to human ken alive."

Though there is less than one might wish in this volume showing the poet feeling as well as rhyming, as do these lines, there is enough of interest to make the book worthwhile for many among us.

CLARK ASHTON SMITH. *Letters to H. P. Lovecraft*. Edited by Steve Behrends. West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1987. viii, 70 pp. \$6.95 pb. Reviewed by S. T. Joshi.

As a fiction writer Clark Ashton Smith belongs at best to the second rank; no amount of effusive praise from his admirers can ever overturn this brutal truth. As a poet Smith is undoubtedly of the first rank, and no amount of indifference by the general or fantasy public will ever overturn this truth. Now we are presented with Smith as an epistolarian: while it is unfortunate that these letters deal principally with Smith's second-rate fiction and not his first-rate poetry, this is offset by the fact that they also provide valuable initial reactions to the unquestionably first-rate fiction of H. P. Lovecraft. Smith's letters are not, on the whole, intrinsically interesting; and while it would be both cruel and unfair to say that Smith may eventually descend to a mere footnote to Lovecraft, there is no doubt that we will read these letters primarily to learn about Lovecraft.

Still, we come away with some positive impressions about Smith. First, we are startled to see how fundamentally different in their outlooks—hence in their creative work—Smith and Lovecraft are: Lovecraft the mechanist materialist, Smith the romantic idealist; Lovecraft the meticulous prose

realist, Smith the pure poetic fantaisiste. And yet, each never ceased to respect the other's work and thought. Smith did come up with some philosophical and aesthetic justification for his brand of fiction: "Science, philosophy, psychology, humanism, after all, are only candle-flares in the face of the eternal night with its infinite reserves of strangeness, terror, sublimity. And surely literature cannot always confine itself to the archives of the anthill and the annals of the hog-sty . . ." This is pretty but not especially profound; but it nonetheless leads to the following conclusion: "My own conscious ideal has been to delude the reader into accepting an impossibility, or series of impossibilities, by means of a sort of verbal black magic, in the achievement of which I make use of prose-rhythm, metaphor, simile, tone-color, counter-point, and other stylistic resources, like a sort of incantation." I shall refrain from determining whether Smith succeeds very often in carrying out his principles; but at least he had carefully worked out principles.

Smith's hostility to literary realism is a consequence of his hostility to modern science: "Of course it would seem that the arguments of material science are pretty cogent. Perhaps it is only my innate romanticism that makes me at least hopeful that the Jeans and the Einsteins have overlooked something." What this means is that Smith was profoundly out of step with both the literary and philosophical tendencies of his day. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but the effect as far as literature is concerned is an almost total escapism. No wonder that Smith was "far happier when I can create everything in a story": he does not have enough sympathy with anything in the real world to portray it realistically. In poetry this sort of escapism may actually be an advantage, especially as most of Smith's poetry either deals with pure emotion or seeks to play off his sense of alienation ("Nero", "A Masque of Forsaken Gods"); in fiction the result is a sort of arid and mechanical unreality. This would be the case even if Smith's prose style were not as clumsy and pretentious as it is—even these letters betray his failings in such irksome neologisms as "actional", "prolificality", and "mentation".

What we will find valuable about these letters is 1) Smith's invariably complimentary but frequently perceptive comments on Lovecraft's stories as he first read them; 2) the running dialogue Smith and Lovecraft conducted about the nature and theory of the weird tale; and 3) the appendix where nine of Smith's letters to August Derleth written directly after Lovecraft's death are printed. Here Smith comes into his own: his penetrating analysis of Lovecraft's myth-cycle, and his searing criticism of Derleth's "Return of Hastur", shew Smith to be incalculably more in tune with Lovecraft's sensibility than Derleth. But the latter, convinced beyond argument that his view of the myth-cycle was self-evidently correct, continued for the next thirty-five years to propagate more misinformation about Lovecraft than any other single figure. But the age of Derleth is past, and Smith is now posthumously vindicated.

Steve Behrends, Smith's most ardent supporter, has edited Smith's letters more carefully than anyone has edited Lovecraft's: his informed introduction, unfailingly useful and succinct annotations, and scrupulous transcription and editing make us hope that Behrends' large [continued on p. 64]

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